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NATURELLEMENT: VARIANT TRANSLATIONS OF THE ACCOUNTS GIVEN BY HOLOCAUST BYSTANDERS IN CLAUDE LANZMANN'S *SHOAH**

Abstract

The article discusses the testimonies of bystanders as presented to the public in Claude Lanzmann's documentary *Shoah*. It proposes to apply norms and practices developed within Holocaust studies to the analysis of the victims' testimonies in the emerging field of bystander studies. The Polish bystanders' utterances in the documentary were edited and simplified through the process of interpretation and re-translation; this inaccurate rendition has been used in Holocaust debates and the lack of sensibility to this aspect of communication in Lanzmann's film may result in skewed interpretation of the bystanders' engagement in the scene of violence. The analysis proves that without renewed scrutiny to the bystanders' speech Holocaust research may lose some important insights. Signs of violence impact, traces of traumatization or brutalization, specificity of cognitive and affective response may be overlooked. The paper calls for an universalizing epistemic approach to all types of the speech emerging from the Holocaust, beyond the (debatable) divisions of its social fabric into victims, perpetrators and bystanders.

Keywords: *Shoah* film, Lanzmann, translation, bystanders, testimony

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1. Testimony in its proper frame

On 24 August 2015, the venerable Pathé Tuschinski cinema[1] in Amsterdam hosted the debate *Between Guilt, Heroism, and a Great Deal of Seductive Normality: Nazi Bystanders as Cultural Icons in Film and Television*, organised as a part of the conference *Probing the Limits of Categorization: The Bystander in Holocaust History*.[2] Although the meeting, as its title suggested, was meant to centre on German bystanders, the discussion soon moved on to Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*, its fragments, chosen for the audience that evening, focusing on bystanders from Poland. None of the scholars present at the meeting noticed the essential logical error of the ensuing discussion: arguments were based not so much on the actual remarks by Polish peasants as on the versions proposed by the translators: the Polish interpreter, who had summarised them in French for the director on the set, and the author of the English subtitles, used in the screening at the Pathé Tuschinski. The fundamental difference in cognitive potential between the utterances is well illustrated by the following quotation from a crucial scene of the film. A bystander's testimony consisting of nearly fifty words, complex and full of complicated explanations, is rendered with exactly one French expression:

Claude Lanzmann: Il était aux premières loges pur voir tout-ça là-bas, non?
[He could watch all this as if from a front row seat, right?]

Barbara Janicka (the interpreter, to Czesław Borowy): Pan spojrzy tam… To widział pan wszystko to, co, jak w loży, to, co tam się działo, prawda?
[Look over there… So you could see all those, like from a front row seat, those things that happened there, right?

Czesław Borowy: No naturalnie, że widziałem. Widziałem… Człowiek i podchodził, i bliżej, i z tamtej strony, bo mamy pola, pola i łąki na tamtej stronie

[1] The place, as it turned out, provided a relevant context for the meeting. The cinema was built by the Polish Jew Abraham Icek Tuszyński (Tuschinski) (1886–1942). As a teenager, Tuszyński set out for the United States from his native Brzeziny near Łódź, but he stopped in Rotterdam and decided to stay in Europe. Within fifteen years, he became the owner of several prosperous cinemas in the Netherlands. He was killed at Auschwitz.

[2] The conference was organised by the Duitsland Instituut in Amsterdam on 24–25 September 2015. The conference proceedings were published in the volume *Probing the Limits of Categorization: The Bystander in Holocaust History* (Morina, Thijs 2019). The discussion was moderated by Nicole Colin and Wulf Kansteiner.

torów, więc żeśmy przejeżdżali, i się z pola szło, i na pole, no i śmy wszystko widzieli, no. Jak oni tu…

> Well, I saw it, naturally. I saw… You came, and you came nearer and from the other side, for we have fields, fields and meadows on the other side of the tracks, so we moved across, and you went from the field and into the field, so we saw all this, yes. How they here…

Barbara Janicka (to Lanzmann): Naturellement.[3]
[Naturally]

This joint oversight occurred after the "era of the witness"[4], which had resulted in increased awareness of the significance and methods of research on testimony. Omissions, stumbles, repetitions and distortions in Holocaust testimonies had been identified as symptoms of traumatic experience, providing valuable evidence of the hardly expressible or inexpressible past. The study of survivors' recorded, written and/or published accounts had led to very high standards of processing the material, especially after the "ethical turn" in the 1990s (Glowacka 2012: 4–5). Today, the standards involve above all respect for the communicated meaning, irrespective of its sometimes hobbled form (Felman, Laub 1992; see also Kushner 2006) and attention paid to the smallest detail not only at the factual level, but also as regards the articulation: fluency of sentence structure, vocal emission, gesticulation and body language (Kidron 2009). The ethical requirement is combined with a non-reductive approach to the material and with multi-level analysis using

[3] In transcribing this fragment, I used the edition *Shoah: A Film by Claude Lanzmann*, Videofilmexpress 2009. See also the transcript of the conversation with Czesław Borowy, Treblinka, July 1976, take 46, roll 25, material of the United States Holocaust Museum, film no. 1996.166; RG-60.5032; film ID: 3348, 3349, 3350, 3351. Transcript of the text in French: https://collections.ushmm.org/film_findingaids/RG-60.5032_01_trs_fr.pdf (access: 1.06.2019).

[4] In western Holocaust studies, the 1960s and the 1970s are known as the "era of the witness" (Wieviorka 2006) or the "era of testimony" (Felman, Laub 1992). Witnesses in Western Europe, the US and Israel received special attention after the trial of Adolf Eichmann, videotaped for television broadcast. It is worth noting that the "era of the witness" in Poland coincided with the post-war period, when the Chief Commission for Investigation of German Crimes in Poland and the Central Jewish Historical Commission gathered evidence provided by Jewish and non-Jewish Holocaust witnesses. Latin America is, from 1960s a scene of *testimonio* – testimonial narrative that reveals in a first-person account the voices of those underprivileged or marginalized (Gugelberger, Kearney 1991).

diverse tools. The epistemic framework is determined here by the special autonomy of such testimonies:

> Testimony unexpectedly emerges to be a compelling, engaging, powerfully mobilizing process that can be examined on its own terms. Testimony, thus, has its own frame within which its analysis can proceed. Applying a methodology, which disregards this inherent frame, risks losing touch with the very essence, the very subjectivity of the testimonial process (Laub 2009: 142).

The event at the Pathé Tuschinski revealed, like the technique of foreshortening in perspective painting, some unacknowledged presuppositions that need to be critically addressed. Firstly, the standards of work with a testimony are not universal, and they seem to be applied exclusively to testimonies of victims. Secondly, evidence given by bystanders does not carry the same testimonial weight and have same authority (Young 1988) as the words of the persecuted. Thirdly, translation as a barrier or an access code to a testimony continues to pass unnoticed. Moreover, it becomes evident, the Polish language does not belong to the set of languages acknowledged as source speech for global Holocaust studies.[5] Polish accounts are not treated as a material to be protected from manipulation and as a source that demands from a researcher mastering the code in which it has been written; rather, they make merely an excess commentary which might be considered only after its simplification and translation into the dominant language (in this case, French and English).[6] Finally, the principles of attentive and ethical listening may easily be suspended by pre-established categories and hierarchies.

The texts and documents (comments and comparative tables) presented below are a gesture of opposition to this situation and a proposal for of consistent use of methods developed in Holocaust studies in relation to witness' speech to analyse all kinds of speech deriving from or concerning the Holocaust. They are an outcome of an experimental project which began in 2016, an ongoing pilot study carried out by a group of scholars from the

[5] Dorota Głowacka (2016b: 304) mentions that after watching *Shoah* in 1985, Ewa Kuryluk commented with indignation: "Lanzmann's camera brings the Polish language itself to trial" (see Kuryluk 1986). Timothy Snyder also advocates for inclusion of data archived in Polish language into historical research.

[6] The dominance of English has been discussed by Dorota Głowacka in her article *The Tower of Babel: Holocaust Testimonials and the Ethics of Translation* (Głowacka 2018) and by Alan Rosen in *Sounds of Defiance: The Holocaust, Multilingualism, and the Problem of English* (Rosen 2008).

Centre for Translation Studies and the Research Centre for Memory Cultures at the Faculty of Polish Studies of the Jagiellonian University. The scholars of translation studies and memory studies have been cooperating for three years in analysing spoken material from several selected scenes of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*. They have been aided by experts in translation, memory, anthropology, dialects, communication, digital humanities, Yiddish culture, the history of the Holocaust and last but not least – the history of cinema.[7] Preliminary observations and conclusions from this diagnostic study, which is still in progress, are discussed here by the participants in the project, Magda Heydel, Karolina Kwaśna, Sylwia Papier and Joanna Sobesto.

2. A treasure not to be squandered

The documentary *Shoah*, from 1985, has been an obvious choice for the project for many reasons. The film, produced by Lanzmann for eleven years between 1975 and 1985, was released after a large-scale promotional campaign. Since then, it has invariably been viewed as a crucial statement on the Holocaust and as a landmark in the history of Holocaust documentaries. According to Stuart Liebman (2007: 5), it continues to be the key film, featuring prominently in rankings and discussions on documentaries[8], on

[7] The contributors included, from the Faculty of Polish Studies at the Jagiellonian University: Magda Heydel (Centre for Translation Studies), Roma Sendyka (Research Center for Memory Cultures), Monika Zabrocka (Pedagogical University in Kraków), Karolina Kwaśna, Joanna Sobesto, Sylwia Papier and Barbara Bruks (PhD candidates) as participants of the project, aided by Artur Czesak (Chair for Translation Studies and Intercultural Communication, Jagiellonian University), Karolina Szymaniak (Department of Jewish Studies, University of Wrocław), Jan Rybicki (the Institute of English Studies, Jagiellonian University) and Victoria Miluch (Fulbright Scholar). Several meetings took place during the 7th Jan Błoński Festival (*Testimony of Literature*, 25–26 May 2017), where preliminary results of the project were presented and where Tomasz Łysak (Institute of Specialised and Intercultural Communication, University of Warsaw) and Bartosz Kwieciński (Centre for Holocaust Studies, Jagiellonian University) gave their advice. We are also grateful to Dorota Kozicka (Chair of Contemporary Criticism, Jagiellonian University), Erica Lehrer (Concordia University), Dorota Głowacka (King's College, Halifax) and Bożena Karwowska (University of British Columbia) for their kind support. The project was discussed by Magda Heydel at the 5th Conference of the International Association of Translation and Intercultural Studies in Hong Kong in 2018, with valuable comments made by, among others, Sharon Deane-Cox (University of Strathclyde).

[8] *Shoah* takes the second place in the ranking of documentary films of all time published by the *Sight and Sound* monthly. See https://www.bfi.org.uk/sight-sound-magazine/greatest-docs (access: 02.06.2019).

representations of the Holocaust and accounts given by perpetrators or victims. It serves also as paradigmatic evidence on bystanders, as the Amsterdam conference showed. Gaining international recognition, *Shoah* – together with dialogues and visual presentation of Polish witnesses – became a topos of global Holocaust studies.

Moreover, it is often acknowledged that it was Lanzmann who introduced interviewing bystanders as a standard method of gathering Holocaust testimonies (e.g. Schlott 2019: 40).[9] To be sure, he was not the first or the only to appreciate the perspective of ordinary people, as Raul Hilberg explains in his memoirs *Politics of Memory* (1996: 191), because that approach had been taken in contacts with victims by John Dickinson in 1967 (see Dickinson and Hilberg 2001) and with perpetrators by Christopher Browning (Browning 1992).[10] Lanzmann, however, undoubtedly originated the strategy of interviewing. in front of the camera, people who represented all three groups involved in the conflict: perpetrators, victims and bystanders, who were not necessarily key or known personalities. The film may indeed be treated as the first film recording of accounts given by Polish bystanders presented to the international public. Lanzmann himself recognised the worth of his production in that respect:

> I was the first person to return to the scene of the crime, to those who had never spoken and, I was beginning to realize, wanted so much to speak, to speak torrentially. It was vital, it was imperative to preserve this purity, this spontaneity; this Poland was a treasure not to be squandered (Lanzmann 2013: 477).[11]

Lanzmann's documentary is important for other reasons, too. The division of participants in the conflict into three groups was introduced by Hilberg in his book *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe,*

[9] Of course, this remark concerns film recordings. Interviews and testimonies were gathered by many Polish institutions already in the post-war period.

[10] Civilian experience of war was presented by two prior documental films: *The World at War* (1973–74), the British series by Jeremy Isaacs and David Elstein, and by the French documentary *Chronique d'un été* (1961) by Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin. I am greatful to Tomasz Łysak for this remark. See also: Łysak 2016.

[11] The tone of this comment and the implied image of Poland as a "virgin" country and of himself as its "explorer" and "the first historian" may serve as a good argument for people criticising the film director for his "colonial" attitude. See e.g. Grzegorz Niziołek, *Lęk przed afektem* (Niziołek 2016: 9–17), Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Spowiedź farmazona* (Tokarska-Bakir 2010 https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/1706-spowiedz-farmazona.html, access: 2.05.2019), and Głowacka 2016.

1933–1945 (1993). The third part of that text, which concerns bystanders in a broad sense: onlookers, passive or engaged witnesses, and people giving evidence, begins with a quotation from *Shoah*: "He says, it's this way: if I cut my finger, it doesn't hurt him". This is commented on by Hilberg in the following way: "A translator's explaining an answer given to Claude Lanzmann by Czesław Borowi, a Pole who lived near the death camp Treblinka" (Hilberg 1992: 193). The testimony of the Polish bystander recorded by Lanzmann, in July 1978, is thus presented as the model from which the concept of bystander has derived. Hilberg himself admitted three years later that the idea for the book – its threefold categorisation continuing to be used, criticised and discussed today (see Schlott 2019; Morina, Thijs 2019) – had been suggested to him by Lanzmann's arrangement of the documentary material (Hilberg 1996: 191).

Another reason for focusing on the French documentary is related with its archival potential. Unused tapes with more than three hundred and forty hours of recording, as estimated by the director, and the accompanying documents, were deposited in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1997[12] and they have been made available online since 2007.[13] Dorota Głowacka has proved that the outtakes include abundant material, of fundamental importance, which "displays the dynamics of Polish memory of the Holocaust" (Głowacka 2016b: 302). Consequently, Lanzmann's film requires more research in the frames of media archaeology if we continue to use *Shoah* as a source document on bystanders' attitudes: the recorded testimonies of bystanders are more extensive and their context is more varied than those presented in the documentary itself.

But our choice of the film made over thirty years ago, has been substantiated primarily by current dynamics and trends in Holocaust studies. Decades of focusing on the victims, which began with the Eichmann trial in 1961, have been followed, since the 1990s, by worldwide research on the perpetrators, and those two fields can now be treated as autonomic institutionalised subdisciplines of Holocaust Studies. Research on the bystanders, though carried out only since the turn of the 21st century (see Barnett 2000; Cesarani, Levine 2014), is becoming an exhaustive systematic study. If Lanzmann's

[12] On the history of that material, see Cazenave 2019.

[13] We are grateful to Lindsay Zarwell from the USHMM for her advice. The museum's French and English transcripts of dialogues recorded in the outtakes have been made available online as well. However, this additional information, which accompanies relevant film fragments, does not include transcripts of remarks made in Polish.

film is to remain a stable point of reference for scholars interested in the subject, it is vital that the material in Polish is accessible to them without distortion or at least that they are aware of the inaccessibility of the actual message recorded on the film reel as well as of the part translation has in this communication.

3. *Shoah*: six versions of the film

Shoah is crucial also in the Polish context of remembering the Holocaust. The film was screened in Poland in an abridged and – as it may be assumed from the preserved edit decision list[14] – re-edited version on 30 October 1985, half a year after its French première. It triggered off a process of self-analysis and memory retrieval (see Forecki 2010: 132 ff.). The discussion which followed was the first mass public exchange of thoughts about Polish-Jewish relations after March 1968, resulting in Jan Błoński's landmark essay *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto* (Poor Poles looking at the ghetto) published two years later.[15] Two extensive Polish analyses of the documentary reconstruct debates from that period and provide the history of its reception (see Forecki 2010, Kwieciński 2012).[16]

According to the estimate of the Radio and Television Committee[17], the film, aired on the first channel of Polish Television in prime time, gathered over two times more viewers than usual for films of that kind, probably half of adult Poles. Polls noted 68 per cent of negative opinions. After the show, experts in the studio encouraged the audience to send their comments, and the letters have survived as a valuable record of the reception (and of the actual form of the screened version). Anna Sawisz, who has studied the material in its

[14] We have not been able to find the abridged version in the archives of Polish Television. I am grateful to Tomasz Łysak for consulting this article and his many insightful comments.

[15] *Tygodnik Powszechny* 2 (1997). The English version can be found here in *Yad Vashem Studies*, Volume XIX, 1988, pp. 341–355, edited by Aharon Weiss or online: https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/the-poor-poles-look-at-the-ghetto-144232 (access: 2.05.2019),

[16] The documentary has also been discussed by Tomasz Majewski (*Sub specie mortis: Uwagi o* Shoah *Claude'a Lanzmanna*, see the anthology *Pamięć Shoah. Kulturowe reprezentacje I praktyki upamiętniania* (Majewski, Zeidler-Janiszewska 2011).

[17] Document no 31/383 from November 1985. I am grateful to Tomasz Łysak for sharing the materials about *Shoah* with me.

direct social and media context, states that the criticism mainly concerned "the distorted view of the Poles and their ignored sacrifice" (Sawisz 1992: 143).[18]

Lanzmann blamed the negative response on the smear campaign carried out by Polish authorities since the Paris première (Lanzmann 2013: 494). There had, indeed, been a heated debate going on in Poland, which was caused by rumours about anti-Polish overtones of the film. However, the director's prejudiced attitude was first mentioned by *Libération*, in a review published after the première, under the heading *La Pologne au banc des accuses* (Poland in the dock). The charge was clearly then substantiated by something more than Polish obsession with self-image. Lanzmann himself noted similar voices in the West; to his amazement, "some of those who defended *Shoah* in France, essentially among the intellectuals, and recognizing all the strengths of the film, found it nonetheless stained, alas, by an anti-Polish bias" (Lanzmann 2013: 494–495).

This concurrence of opinions across the Iron Curtain is the more remarkable because the audiences in Poland and in France – I would like to especially stress this fact – did not watch the same documentary. As it was already mentioned, on the request of the Polish producer Lew Rywin, Lanzmann consented to two-hour abridgement of more than nine hours of the original film, which was an astonishing exception to his usual approach.[19] According to Lanzmann, Rywin was mostly interested in "Polish scenes", although the edit decision list shows that not all of them were included in the Polish version (the abridgement covered scenes with Srebrnik, Borowy and Karski as well as scenes in Włodawa, Treblinka, Grabów and Chełmno; conversations with Falborski and Piwoński were not mentioned in the list). Rywin also chose interviews with some of the victims (e.g. with Bomba, Vrba, Zaïdel, Glazar, Müller and Biren) and – as far as it is possible to assess it – all German comments (by Suchomel, Stier, Schalling, Spiess, Michelson). In the main, four reels with the Polish version retained the original sequence, though

[18] Half of the comments were negative. From among 149 letters, 27 were sent from small towns and 12 from villages. It seems, therefore, that the response of the group portrayed in the documentary was rather limited (Sawisz 1992: 141).

[19] Lanzmann described political details of the transaction in his memoir *The Patagonian Hare* (2013: 496–499). Lew Rywin was quoted by Anna Bikont in her article "A on krzyczał: 'Wszyscy jesteście kapo'" published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* in April 1997 (Bikont 1997) after the documentary had been aired in its entirety by Canal Plus on 2 and 9 October 1997. In 1985, the full version of the film was screened by two small cinemas in Warsaw. Polish Television showed the nine-hour film on its local channel TVP3 only in 2003.

certain scenes were shifted (for example, Abraham Bomba appeared for the first time before the conversation with Helena Pietyra). The interviews were drastically shortened, too, e.g. the forty-minute meeting with Jan Karski was reduced to twelve minutes and it is impossible to state which part of his talk was presented to the Polish public. Surprisingly, this Polish version is hardly known in the extensive literature on the film both in Poland and abroad. As a result, we do not really know what the Poles actually saw in 1985.

The variant ontologies of the various versions of the monumental and therefore seemingly unalterable *Shoah* can be observed at the textual level as well. In 1985, Lanzmann published a transcript of the dialogues with the introduction by Simone de Beauvoir.[20] The volume, translated into many languages, has commonly been accepted as the standard source of quotations.[21] Its Polish version, by Marek Bieńczyk, appeared in 1993.[22] Bieńczyk translated the French sentences spoken on the set by Lanzmann's interpreter Barbara Janicka back into Polish. In this, he consistently used a stripped-down style reminiscent of Tadeusz Różewicz's poetic idiom, which was easier because the French publishers had divided the transcribed utterances into lines according to the conventions of subtitling, which made the oral testimony reminiscent of post-Holocaust poetry. The shifts in the chain of translations and the replacing of speech with transcript have brought the recorded words closer to the literary style of free verse, and moved away from the form of an ethnographic record. For example, Borowy's remark, uttered near Treblinka, one of the most notorious statements cited to illustrate the bystanders' indifference, runs in the film as follows:

> No wie pani, no strach? Strach, to jak, wie pani, jak pani się skaleczy, to mnie nie boli.[23]
> [Well, you know, well, fear? Fear, it's like, you know, if you cut yourself, I feel no pain.]

In Bieńczyk's translation, Janicka's summary runs like this:

> mówi, że jeśli się skaleczę w palec,
> to jego nie boli.

[20] See Lanzmann 1985. The volume was described by its publishers – contrary to the facts – as containing "the complete text of the film by Claude Lanzmann".

[21] The English edition: 1985; the German edition: 1986.

[22] See Lanzmann 1993.

[23] In the 58th minute of the recording.

[he says that if I cut my finger,
He feels no pain.]
(Lanzmann 1993: 36)

From the Polish (bystander) perspective, then, Lanzmann's *Shoah* is not only the monumental cohesive work discussed amply in Holocaust studies worldwide. It has three visual versions at least: the full version, the abridgement and – as I would like to argue – the complementary version. The outtakes are necessary in order to really understand the bystanders' perspectives and motivations. The material gathered for the purpose of *Shoah* becomes, in today's research, a hypothetical "extended" version. This is supported by the fact that the outtakes were archived, musealized and turned into a research resource. Furthermore, one needs to remember about three textual variants: the bystanders' words captured on film (1), their summary translated into the standard (and foreign) language by the interpreter on the set (2) and the transposition of this rendered material into written language, first into French, than back into Polish (in a different register: in its high-literary version) (3). As in the case of the film versions, the questionable equivalence of those variants of words spoken originally in Polish, with the exception of the research by Dorota Growacka is neither thematised nor analysed in the so numerous discussions of Lanzmann's documentary in Poland and within global Holocaust studies. The examples quoted above suffice to assess the potential extent of the resulting misunderstandings.

The texts by Karolina Kwaśna, Joanna Sobesto and Magda Heydel, published in this volume, refer to one of the film scenes we have examined, the discussion in front of the church in Chełmno.[24] The authors analyse losses and omissions caused by the successive retranslations: the disappearance of spontaneity and freedom of enunciation, of the polyphony of communication (people outshouting one another or taking over one by one), of signals of negotiating position and hierarchy (within the group and between participants in the dialogue), of markers of the specific geographic location of

[24] Lanzmann's film has not been the only source of evidence from inhabitants of that region. The first testimonies were gathered after the war; their transcript has been published as *Mówią świadkowie Chełmna* (Pawlicka-Nowak 2004a; the English version: Pawlicka-Nowak 2004b). The last living witnesses were interviewed for USHMM in Chełmno in March 1998; the report on that project has been written by Alina Skibińska (Skibińska 2004a, the English version: Skibińska 2004b). The scene in Chełmno has been analysed by numerous scholars, e.g. by Shoshana Felman (2000: 123 ff) and Dorota Głowacka (2016b: 306–308).

the event (local accents and linguistic variants), and of the impact of war speech (Germanisms, linguistic traces of being traumatized). The translation we can follow on the screen does not render the effort those people made to find the right words, to hastily recollect the correct version of the standard Polish language they had learnt at school, considered as more appropriate for the occasion of conversing with a ”guest”, to find “sophisticated” expressions corresponding to the solemnity and importance of their testimony. Obviously, the retranslations cannot convey the body movements and the way the people positioned themselves in relation to the camera and to one another (see the text by Sylwia Papier). Reduction and abridgement blur the processes of memory retrieval, of negotiating the facts and remembering the details, as every stumble, hesitation and repetition is deleted. Consequently, we cannot appreciate the relational, material and situational nature of the evidence co-constituting the basis for assumptions about the type and mode of the remembering. What we get is generalised meaning, often – as Kwaśna, Heydel and Sobesto argue – excessively simplified, deprived of its affective and recollective alignments and leading to wrong conclusions.

4. False witnesses and their interpreters

When Shoshana Felman listens to the discussion in Chełmno, she questions the effects of the work of the bystanders' memory. She does not accept that they visualise – with empathy, respect or aggression – that part of the Jewish experience they could not see: the cries of the Jews herded in the church, the plundering of suitcases. “The Poles distort the facts and *dream their memory*”, thus becoming “false witnesses” who give evidence not out of sympathy for the victims, but to mystify their own attitude to the crime – to mystify it, because the bystanders cannot be witnesses: they saw nothing, though they were so close (Felman 2000: 129).

Felman, co-author of the influential concept of witnessing the Holocaust (Felman, Laub 1992), analyses Lanzmann's documentary in detail. She notices instantly the dominant role of the director's narration and is aware that the French language has been placed at the centre of linguistic gravity of the film.[25] She identifies methods used to create the alienation effect

[25] Margaret Olin writes that French is “the language of consciousness through which the events of the film are filtered” – the privileged consciousness hidden in the dialogues (Olin 1997: 7).

and to widen the gap between the filmmaker and the bystanders. She lists Lanzmann's rhetorical devices, nowadays interpreted as symptomatic of the interviewer's unfriendly attitude to the interviewees: the echoing of clumsy or inadvertently self-incriminating expressions of simple people, a way to provide an ironic comment on their words and sometimes to suggest their callousness or petty-mindedness. Felman does not turn these remarks into an accusation, because she is interested not in the testimonies of the Polish bystanders but in the speech of the victims as revealed in the film. However, her reading of the discussion in Chełmno shows the consequences of the bystanders' downgraded position: their contribution disappears in the series of retranslations, their means of expression seem of no significance, their evidence can only be incomplete, their motives egoistic. The director's strategy of obtaining and presenting the material, his disregard for the Polish language, and his (and Felman's) unreserved acceptance of the translation as a faithful rendition all lead to the obvious conclusion that the bystanders must make an unreliable source.

The distortion of the message can easily be blamed on the interpreter. Anna Sawisz has found two such charges in the letters sent to the Polish television channel in response to the documentary. One viewer wrote:

> Everyone is quick to criticise Lanzmann, while no-one pays attention to the interpreter who accompanies him. Lanzmann is French and she is Polish. Without batting an eye, the lady agrees to take part in the clearly dishonest enterprise, though she is perfectly aware what is going on. She translates the mindless gibbering of Lanzmann's interlocutors with great skill and fidelity, and it never occurs to her to protest at this blatant manipulation. Isn't she more to blame, as a Pole, than Lanzmann, a Frenchman? (Sawisz 1992: 245)

Contrary to the suspicions of the worried viewer, the impact of Barbara Janicka and the other interpreters[26] on the final message was noticed by the critics.[27] Janicka was interviewed by Wanda Matałowska for the *Polityka*

[26] Barbara Janicka replaced Maryna Ochab, who, according to Lanzmann (he noted her name falsely as "Marina"), had problems with organising and conducting the interviews due to her "Jewish" appearance (2013: 481). The other translators were Fanny Apfelbaum, who translated from Yiddish, and Francine Kaufmann, a translator from Hebrew.

[27] Differences in their approaches are described by Anna Dayan-Rosenman in her article "Shoah: L'écho du silence" published in: *Au sujet de Shoah: le film de Claude Lanzmann* (Dayan-Roseman 1990). For instance, Janicka is the most consistent in maintaining her detachment from "the words, witnesses and the story itself", e.g. by using the polite form (like

weekly in 1985. The interpreter, who had not yet seen the film in its entirety, focused on the challenge the cooperation with Lanzmann had been to her, on the unfulfilled promises he had made to ordinary people,[28] on his megalomania and prejudices. She did not comment on the method of interpreting she had chosen; she only remarked that the work had been "unusual as regards its subject and its author" (Janicka 1985: 11). Francine Kaufmann wrote about her participation in the film in 1993.[29] She confirmed Janicka's opinion on the difficult cooperation with the director: "My position was uncomfortable, to say the least!" (Kaufmann 1993: 671).

Lanzmann himself directed attention to the translation as an element of his filmmaking. When publishing the transcript of the dialogues, he began with thanking his three interpreters: Barbara Janicka, Francine Kaufman and "Ms. Apfelbaum". He stated that he had "completely respected their method of translation …, the exact words, the hesitations, the repetitions – all the crutches of the spoken language" (Lanzmann 1985b: xi). This courtesy and the stress on the "realism of translation" were in fact criticism in disguise: in *The Patagonian Hare*, Lanzmann commented harshly on Janicka, whom he accused of moderating "everything, both the forthrightness of my questions and the often incredible violence of the Polish responses" (Lanzmann 2013: 481).

Critics, too, have taken interest in translation in Lanzmann's documentary. Its function has been identified at several levels: as a necessary element of communication between two people speaking different languages, as a sign of multiple voices and, consequently, multiple nationalities involved in the global conflict. Particular emphasis has been placed on translation as a metaphor for the work of memory and bearing witness, expressed especially in repeating the witnesses' comments (the "echo" marking deeper identification), in the very process of evoking the bystander's experience (initiating a "return of trauma") and in the stumbles and omissions (morphologically equal to repressed memory or forgetting; see Kaufmann 1993:

monsieur) and third-person sentences. The translation from Yiddish retains the first-person pronoun ("I, me") of the witness, while the translation from Hebrew exchanges the pronoun in the first person singular for the third person singular.

[28] The director did not intend to invite his interlocutors to the première (Kaufmann 1993), though the Polish translator noted that he had made the promise many times (Janicka 1985).

[29] Kaufman also quotes Apfelbaum, with whom she had talked about her work with Lanzmann (Kaufman 1993: 667).

669, Stoicea 2006: 48; Głowacka 2016b and 2018). The interpreters in *Shoah* were undoubtedly witnesses to testifying, in the sense discussed by Laub in the text on an event without a witness (Felman, Laub 1992: 75); they were also the first viewers of the filmed material and (in the case of Janicka) a major character featuring in the recorded scenes (Kaufmann 1993: 670).

In practice, the relationship between the Polish source text and its translation was hindered for various reasons. Lanzmann let witnesses speaking Hebrew or Yiddish retrieve memories and talk at their own pace. He was more blunt when interviewing Germans (McGlothin 2010) and brusque in his contacts with Poles: he sped up the exchange, ignoring the rhythm of the bystanders' memory (see Kaufmann 1993: 672), made ironic remarks, interrupted, pressed, provoked. His "fraudulent" colonial strategy (see Joanna Tokarska-Bakir 2010; Niziołek 2016, Głowacka 2016b), which distorted names of people (also victims: Srebrnik and Rotem) and of places, led to the "elimination of evidence in the Polish language" by making it exotic and invalid both in relation to the bystanders' memories and the survivors' testimonies. As a result, "neither in the film nor in the outtakes is there a real dialogue between Lanzmann and the Polish eyewitnesses about Polish memories of the Holocaust: those two models of memory are entirely divergent" (Głowacka 2016b: 305). So, when Simone de Beauvoir wrote in her introduction to *Shoah* that the voices of Polish witnesses had been indifferent, even somewhat derisive (de Beauvoir 1985: viii), she submitted to the impression created by Lanzmann: she wrongly projected the modal and ethical framework designed by the director on the interviewees themselves.

5. The distorted versions as indispensable evidence

As Głowacka writes, Polish evidence has not yet found its way into global Holocaust studies. It was discredited by the Germans during the war, removed from the flow of information in the communist period: hushed up due to anti-Jewish politics of memory and the dominant martyrological ethos in the Polish People's Republic (Głowacka 2016b: 310). "The evidence was given, however, and even the moments with negative overtones are worth bringing out from the black holes of oblivion and from the vacuum of Lanzmann's translation" (Głowacka 2016b: 310).

It must be stressed that a careful scrutiny of the testimonies recorded by the French director has a double-edged effect. It restores the interviewees'

subjectivity and recognizes their opinions, emotions and retrieved memories as evidence, necessary to understand the past, even if the re-membered and narrated information is often imprecise and fallible (incidentally, the same may be said about the testimonies of the victims).[30] However, the rationalizations and explanations given by the Polish bystanders do not only result from misremembering, they are also slanders, whitewashing lies, prejudices or shameful manipulation quite obvious to the listener today. They may prove the lack of empathy with the victims and reveal deep layers of anti-Judaism and antisemitic views. Therefore, the effort to understand and explain that communication, and restore subjectivity of its subjects, cannot lead to justification of the frame of violence they are part of.

The testimonies of the Polish bystanders, therefore, bring ambivalent data, some of them taking us closer to the past, precise and exact, some distancing us from the historical event, based solely on speculation or prejudice. "While being a distorted version of history", Głowacka writes, "this negative evidence uncovers layers of mutual connections and entanglements in Polish memory of the Holocaust" (Głowacka 2016b: 301). Forgetting, lies and repressed memory coexist there with clear recollections, eagerness to bear witness, and dramatic returns of traumatic images. This extremely complex amalgam cannot be studied through a summary. What is needed is access to the same kind of data as that used to examine effectively the testimonies of the survivors: the data showing details of articulation, gestures, management of ambiguities, the rhythm of silences.

The texts published in this volume by no means demand "respect for the Polish viewpoint" or for "Polish sacrifice". As I stressed above, listening intently to the Polish testimonies may result both in recovering their meaning and in further discrediting their capacity to serve as evidence. What we argue for, however, is "epistemic justice" as opposed to "testimonial injustice" (Domańska 2017: 44 quoting Mirana Fricker); that is, we advocate for meticulous and impartial study of the available bystander data, and further development of this field of knowledge, potentially useful in research on the history of the Holocaust.

To illustrate the above claim: it is easy to overlook – as Lanzmann himself shows – the fact that it is in Polish that the accusation central to this

[30] See e.g. https://www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/learning-environment/use-of-testimony.html (access: 1.06.2019).

great documentary is voiced for the first time in the film. *To jest – taka – morderstwo*[31] ("This is – kinda – murder"), someone says off camera, while Szymon Srebrnik sings in the boat floating slowly on the river. The sentence is unclear. It needs support, it needs translation, making it contemporary and available to a broader audience, in order that we all could comprehend exactly what has been said. And it is a matter of no small importance, and the viewer of *Shoah* must understand it well:

> „Ce qui s'est passé ici, c'était un meurtre"[32]
> What happened here… was a murder".[33]

Translated by Anna Skucińska

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[31] In the fifth minute into the film; anonymous words of a witness from Chełmno concerning Srebrnik's return to the town.

[32] Quoted after Lanzmann 1985a: 24.

[33] Quoted after Lanzmann 1985b: 5.

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